

Christchurch 27/12/2020
Faith-Our Love For God

Welcome and Call to Worship

Hello everyone and welcome to our Christchurch streamed worship this morning, 27th December. I hope you have all had a blessed Christmas, that you've had time to reach out to loved ones, and experience something of the joy of the coming of Christ. This has been a Christmas like no other, yet still we celebrate Immanuel - God with us. I'm Sarah Peacock a preacher in the North Herts Circuit of the Methodist Church, based at Central Methodist Church Letchworth. It feels slightly odd as I am recording this service before Christmas, still in a time of waiting and preparation, and yet this morning we are looking at the fulfilment of a longing for many years. As the completion of the Advent series of services "Discover Hidden Treasure This Christmas" we look at Faith- our love for God. We take the account of The presentation of Jesus at the temple and reflect on Simeon and Anna, their faith and the fulfilment of many years of waiting. Let's begin our worship with a few words of prayer.

The waiting is over.
We have gathered round the crib
reflecting on this most wonderful
vision of your glory
come to earth, to live amongst us.
We pause for a few moments
to seek to understand
Just what that means for us
And for the world.
Filled with awe,
we come to praise you, Lord.
Amen

Born in the Night (193 singing the faith)

Born in the night, Mary's Child,
a long way from your home;
coming in need, Mary's Child,
born in a borrowed room.

Clear shining light, Mary's Child,
your face lights up our way;
light of the world, Mary's Child,
dawn on our darkened day.

Truth of our life, Mary's Child,
you tell us God is good;
prove it is true, Mary's Child,

go to your cross of wood.

Hope of the world, Mary's Child,
you're coming soon to reign;
Saviour of all, Mary's Child,
walk in our streets again.

Geoffrey Ainger

Let us pray

A child is born
A child to save us
WE SHARE THE NEWS WITH GREAT JOY

A child is born
A child to challenge us
WE SHARE THE NEWS WITH GREAT JOY

A child is born
A child for the world
WE SHARE THE NEWS WITH GREAT JOY. (Ruth Burgess - Hay and Stardust)

As we come to you, loving God,
Child in the manger,
Lord in Heaven,
Open our eyes to see you,
Here in our world today.
We praise you that you are here amongst us,
That you call us your friends,
That you let us gaze a while in wonder at the stable scene,
Then you challenge us to respond
In worship
In faith
In love.

It's tempting to stay in the circle of warmth and security,
Star lit, wrapped in swaddling love,
What a wonder- but we can't stay for ever
There's a world outside
Struggling to find you
Forgive us Lord when we dwell too long
Gazing inwards instead of reaching out
Hiding away instead of sharing your love
Fear-full instead of Faith-full.

Help us to know your forgiveness
And to find your strength
To love as you love us
Today and always,

AMEN

In our Bible reading we see Mary and Joseph fulfil the requirements of the time, and take their precious new born son to the temple to give thanks and to dedicate him to God.

Luke Chapter 2 verses 22-40

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.[e] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to

God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Thanks be to God for the reading of his word.

Reflection

The Temple at the time of Jesus's birth would have been a busy place, people coming in and going out, praying, coming to make sacrifices, trading (think of Jesus later in the gospels overturning the tables), and no doubt - just as we did when we could gather in person in worship, chatting together, catching up with the gossip, sharing news. Noise and bustle.

Yet here we have an amazing account, of two Godly people, who in all this chaos find the one child, the one small family, who fulfil all their longings- who justify their faith of many years.

Simeon was longing for the comfort of Israel- and believed that he would see it. He was led by the spirit, to be in the right place at the right time- and then then to recognise the precious baby- Jesus himself, who was to be the saviour - and the light to the Gentiles.

Anna spent all her time in the temple, she was old, widowed for many years, usually that would have placed her in a very vulnerable position. Yet she spent her life in worship, fasting and prayer. "At that very moment" With her eyes of faith she too saw this tiny child to be someone of supreme importance - to offer the redemption of Jerusalem.

In their recognition of Jesus the faith that, at times , may have seemed to have been been misplaced, was proved. They could respond in praise and worship and tell those around all that they knew. Simeon also had very painful words to share with Mary. Mary had already had much to ponder on with the birth of Jesus, now she is promised great pain, through her precious child.

Our next song is known as the hunger carol, a reminder that even 2000 years after the coming of Jesus there is much to do to ensure that all can live "lives to the full" as promised by Jesus. A challenge to us to move our faith into action.

Song Child of Joy and Peace (194 Singing the Faith)

Child of joy and peace,

born to every race --
by your star, the wise will know you,
East and West their homage show you,
look into your face,
child of joy and peace.

Born among the poor
on a stable floor,
cold and raw, you know our hunger,
weep our tears and cry our anger --
yet you tell us more,
born among the poor:

Every child needs bread
till the world is fed;
you give bread, your hands enable
all to gather round one table --
Christmas must be shared,
every child needs bread.

Son of poverty,
shame us till we see
self-concerned, how we deny you,
by our greed we crucify you
on a Christmas tree,
Son of poverty.

Shirley Erena Murray

Reflection 2

Commented [1]:

As we reflect on Simeon and Anna , both waiting in faith for what they longed for, I'm reminded how much this year we've spent waiting. But there is a difference between waiting impatiently in a queue to get in to the supermarket and waiting in faith for the fulfilment of Gods promise. We are reminded by the writer of Hebrews that " faith is the assurance that what we hope for will come about and the certainty that what we cannot see exists" (Hebrews 1 vs 1)NIV

Meditation of Simeon by Nick Fawcett

It was as though a wave of peace engulfed me,
A great surge of tranquility flooding my soul
With a quietness beyond expression-
For I held him in my arms,
God's promised Messiah-
There, in that little wrinkled face,
That tiny, vulnerable child staring up at me,

The fulfilment of God's eternal promise.

I just can't tell you what that meant to me,
Not only the joy but the relief I felt,
For there had been times when my faith had begun to waver.

But that day, there in the temple, suddenly it all changed-
Faith vindicated,
Hope realised-
For I knew then beyond all doubt
That God had been faithful to his purpose,
His chosen servant there in my arms,
The one who would bring Light to the world,
Salvation to all.

I saw him with my own eyes,
Touched him with my own hands,
And after that I could die happy,
My joy complete,
My faith rekindled,
My soul at peace.

For Simeon and Anna their faith was rewarded by seeing Jesus, and knowing that what they had hoped for had indeed come about.
But how easily they could have missed that moment- if Simeon hadn't listened to the prompting of the Spirit that guided him that day. If Anna had decided that she'd have a day off from the temple, they could have missed Jesus entirely. But they were faithful, kept going, when let's face it, logic would have told them they could give up.

I wonder how your faith has been challenged over this last year? There's no doubt it's been tough. Many have found they have needed something "more", and certainly in the first lockdown attendance at worship, albeit on line, soared. Individuals have drawn strength from their local communities and forged new "families", we've discovered new ways of being Church. Some though have found it hard to see a way through and a way forward, and as always, when there is great suffering the question comes- How can a God of love allow this? What we know, as Christians, and what we proclaim to the world, is that Gods with us. In whatever situation we find ourselves, we have that promise. "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13 vs 5).

It may be difficult to stay faithful at times, and we may feel we need "more" faith, but hold on. Remember it's not the amount of faith we have, but who we place our faith in that matters. Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there, 'and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." Matthew 17 Verse 20

Simeon and Anna stayed faithful, and saw the salvation they longed for. Gaze in wonder with them, and with me, at this precious baby Jesus, and know that In Him is the salvation of the whole world. Stop awhile and treasure the gift that Jesus is to each of us, and let your faith be strengthened. Don't be afraid, he is here, with us, and in Him we can trust. Offer Him your life and your love and know Him as your Lord and Saviour.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

We pray today for all those who are still waiting
Longing, hoping that things will change

For those who are hungry and longing for food

For those who find their lives turned upside down longing for stability

For those who cannot see the way forward longing for guidance

For those in despair longing for hope

For those overwhelmed by guilt longing for forgiveness

For those full of fear longing for peace

For those full of doubt longing for faith

For those longing for healing and a comforting touch

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our Prayer**

We pray too for those who have found their hopes fulfilled

For those who celebrate today

For those who have seen The Light of Christ

For those who have found new life, hope and peace.

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our Prayer**

We offer ourselves to you, living God

With all our weaknesses and strengths

That we may live our lives in faith,

Serving you always, sharing your love,
And bringing your light.

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our Prayer**

The Lords Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn: Love came down at Christmas 210 Singing the Faith

1 Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, love divine;
love was born at Christmas
star and angels gave the sign.

2 Worship we the Godhead,
love incarnate, love divine;
worship we our Jesus!
what shall be our sacred sign?

3 Love shall be our token,
love be yours and love be mine;
love to God and neighbour,
love for prayer and gift and sign.

Christina Georgina Rossetti

Blessing

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.

As we go, May we go in faith
And May the Saviour of the World go with you

Amen

Thanks to all who have helped in the preparation and organisation of this service

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